

VZCZCXRO1314
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHAR #1037 1301408
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 101408Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4394
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS ACCRA 001037

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [GH](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#)
SUBJECT: UNEASY CALM IN GHANA'S DAGBON CONFLICT

REF: ACCRA 1072

¶1. (SBU) Summary: An uneasy calm remains over Ghana's conflict-prone Northern Region. Last April, the two arguing claimants to the Dagbon chieftaincy agreed to bury their chief (Ya-Na) who was murdered in 2002. However, the next step to selecting a new chief -- the Ya-Na's funeral -- remains on hold. The Catholic Bishop of Yendi, who has assumed a peacemaker role, told Poloff during his recent trip to the region that entrenched interests, cynicism, and the lack of justice in the murdered chief's case are behind the delay. The Bishop feels that the potential for violence is low at the moment, but added that one of his biggest fears is that a small, isolated incident could spur larger unrest. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) During Poloff's recent visit to Ghana's Northern Region, a variety of contacts said that the North remains in a state of "uneasy calm" after the 2002 murder and dismemberment of the Ya-Na (the King of the Dagbon traditional area). In April 2006, Andanis and Abudus, the two competing "gates" (lines of succession) of the Dagbon tribe, agreed after extensive negotiation to bury the Ya-Na, who had been in a morgue for four years. While the burial brought hope for more lasting peace in the region, the past year has been marked by wrangling over the funeral, which is the next step toward selecting a new chief.

¶3. (SBU) Bishop Boi Nai, the Bishop of Yendi, told poloff that he has been traveling regularly across the Northern Region in an attempt to reach a resolution amenable to both gates, but has had little success. Boi Nai listed several reasons for the delay in the funeral. The first, he said, is a lack of justice. Andanis claim that the funeral cannot be held until the individuals involved in the Ya-Na's assassination are brought to justice. To the Bishop, however, that is a political question unlikely to be resolved anytime soon, if ever. He has been focusing on persuading the parties to have the funeral and get justice later.

¶4. (SBU) Another issue that may be delaying the funeral is the fact that the individual next in line to be the chief is 75 years old and in poor health, according to the Bishop. If this man took over, he could pass away soon, meaning that the entire process of determining the chieftaincy would have to be repeated. Boi Nai also named entrenched interests as another factor. He said that a mini industry of power brokers and peacemakers has developed who benefit financially and personally from the stalemate. These so-called peacemakers would lose their prestige if a settlement were reached, he opined.

¶5. (SBU) Two potential bright spots for resolving the issue, according to the Bishop, are a Peace Committee and the group of "Eminent Chiefs," made up of prominent Ghanaian chiefs, including the Asantehene, the traditional leader of the Ashantis. The Bishop said that the Peace Committee, which consists of six core members from each side and 15 observers,

has helped broker dialogue. The Regional Minister for the Northern Region, Boniface Abubakar, told us separately that he is considering taking the relevant parties to the conflict to Mole, a small town south of Tamale, and locking them in a room until a solution is reached.

¶6. (SBU) The Bishop stressed that a solution needed to be reached soon. He characterized the young people of the North as distrustful of their elders and claimed that they could resort to violence at some point. These young people have little to do with their time, according to the Bishop, and the perceived instability of the region caused by the internecine disagreements continues to drive away potential investors, further exacerbating economic problems. One of the Bishop's great fears is that a small altercation could grow into something bigger.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: The Bishop is impressive and is seen by nearly everyone in the North as an honest broker. His Christianity and origins in Accra add to his stature in this predominantly Muslim area since he does not appear to have any direct interest other than obtaining peace. While the north is currently at peace, there is always the potential for violence, made more likely by the year-long stalemate over the Ya-Na's funeral.
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